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RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001442

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: BRIDGEBUILDING: NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM
RELATIONS - PART 1

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Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Heather Merritt for Reasons 1
.4 (b and d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: PolOffs met on June 29 with Dr. Josiah Fearon, Anglican Archbishop of Kaduna Diocese, to discuss his work in brokering Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria. Fearon decried politicians' use of faith as a campaigning tool and assessed that most inter-faith animosities in Nigeria are fueled primarily by economic rather than religious concerns. He noted that, although Muslim-Christian relations have progressed considerably in recent years, the crux of interfaith conflict is exceedingly rooted in perceived economic inequities. Fearon, an expert on Nigerian Islam and well-publicized champion of inter-faith reconciliation, is active in Kaduna State politics and supports a number of NGOs focused on fostering education and mutual understanding between Nigerian Christians and Muslims.
END SUMMARY.

Criticizes Using Faith as a Campaigning Tool

12. (C) Fearon was critical of political candidates using religion as a campaign tool and instead advocated that platforms focus on policy issues. Regarding the April 2007 state-level elections, Fearon noted that southern-Kaduna Christians had attempted to convince People's Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial nominee Isaiah Balat to exploit Kaduna's religious divide to solidify a popular base among Christians. Balat publicly criticized this tactic, but lost the PDP gubernatorial nomination to current Kaduna State Governor Mohammed Namadi Sambo. (Comment: Northern Kaduna and Kaduna metropolis are predominantly Muslim while Southern Kaduna is predominantly Christian). He opined that southern-Kaduna political candidates' use of the Christian faith as a rallying point against northern-Kaduna Muslim candidates would prevent the southern-Kaduna polity, which he assessed to be fractured along tribal lines, from fielding a winning gubernatorial candidate in the near-term.

Economics Create Christian-Muslim Divide

¶3. (C) Christian-Muslim relations in Kaduna State have progressed considerably in recent years and Fearon underscored how Kaduna State has become a center for Christian-Muslim dialogue in Nigeria. He made clear his assessment, however, that inter-faith strife in Kaduna State exceedingly emanated from perceived economic inequities buttressed by the indigene/non-indigene divide rather than any deep-seated religious antipathy between Christians and Muslims. He elaborated that indigene Muslims would claim Christians who emigrated to Kaduna State had cornered economic opportunities, while Christians claimed marginalization at the hands of the Muslim establishment. Fearon noted that this mirrored the economic underpinnings of the Catholic/Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland.

¶4. (U) COMMENT: Religious differences often mirror regional and ethnic differences. For example, persons in the North and Middle Belt are predominantly Muslim and from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group while many southern ethnic groups are predominantly Christian. In many areas of the Middle Belt, such as Kaduna, Muslim Fulani tend to be pastoralists, while Muslim Hausa and Christian ethnic groups tend to be farmers or work in urban areas. Consequently, ethnic, regional, economic, and land use competition often correlate with religious differences between competing groups. (See International Religious Freedom Report 2006).

Teaching How the Other Side Lives

¶5. (C) Fearon is involved in a number of NGOs focused on inter-faith dialogue. A well-publicized project with which he is associated is the United States Institute of Peace

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(USIP)-funded and Kaduna-based Interfaith Mediation Centre which spearheads the "Pastor and the Imam" project. Fearon claimed that he originally encouraged Pastor James Wuye, one of the Centre's leaders, to become involved in the project. Early in its implementation, Fearon said both Christians and Muslims involved had serious reservations about the project. Muslim leaders accused Fearon of proselytizing to their community and Christian leaders accused him of "selling out to the Muslims." Wuye later confessed to Fearon his involvement in an aborted assassination plan against him.

¶6. (U) While Wuye's project focuses on grassroots-level engagement, Fearon's Bridgebuilders organization focuses on inter-faith dialogue between national-level religious leaders. This organization sponsors site visits for clergy members and theological exchanges for Christian and Islamic religious academics. For example, Fearon cited an event in which Muslim leaders visited the National Ecumenical Centre in Abuja and envisioned expanding these offerings to include visits for Christian leaders to the National Mosque. He also mentioned how the group had sponsored six Christian and Muslim leaders to visit the UK and participate in a program sponsored by Canterbury Cathedral, which is internationally renowned for its conflict resolution work.

¶7. (U) Fearon said he was also involved in the Jacaranda Farm Project, which focused on brokering inter-faith dialogue on the back of trade education. The project is located at a doctor's former holiday retreat, which Fearon converted into an educational center in which both Christian and Muslim students live in a common residence and learn trades such as poultry farming, allowing students to gain marketable skills as well as learn religious tolerance. Fearon invited PolOffs to visit Jacaranda Farm and to discuss ongoing inter-faith dialogue initiatives at a later date.

Comment

¶18. (C) Christian-Muslim tensions in Kaduna State have eased since the 2002 Miss World Pageant and the 2006 Danish cartoon riots. Inter-faith dialogue initiatives are active in Kaduna and other northern cities with significant Christian populations, including Kano and Maiduguri. While these initiatives may be responsible for some of the lukewarm progress we see in inter-faith reconciliation, their widespread impact remains to be seen and their implementation is often arbitrary. Aside from grassroots-level inter-faith work, the Nigerian government has made strides to amend policies viewed as inimical to peaceful coexistence. President Umaru Yar'Adua has also recently pledged to create an inter-faith advisory council, drawing on prominent Christian and Muslim leaders.

¶19. (C) Post has engaged Pastor James Wuye's Interfaith Mediation Centre, but with mixed results. The Public Affairs Section has been involved with the Centre for approximately ten years and assesses it is cooperative, responsive, and widely praised among the diplomatic community in Nigeria. However, other Post elements, including the Political Section and an embedded U.S. military team have expressed skepticism about the Centre's efficacy. The US military team assessed Wuye's program, while well-intentioned, was poorly-planned and expressed concern that Wuye was more preoccupied with funding the Centre than executing programs. PolOffs assess that Fearon was genuine in his testimonials and entreaties, but may be too close to church and NGO policy to objectively recognize challenges facing these NGOs.
CAMPBELL